

**Fulfilling “Vessels” to “Rites”:
Sacrificial Vessels in the Qianlong Court’s *Illustrated
Regulations for Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the
Imperial Qing Dynasty***

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Abstract

The present study analyzes the chapter on sacrificial vessels in *Illustrated Regulations for Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Imperial Qing Dynasty (Huangchao liqi tushi)* to discuss how the Qianlong emperor and his officials put into practice the idea of “updating forms of old” to reinterpret ancient ritual vessels and materialize the “rites.” First, the study approaches the subject from the relationship between “vessels” and “illustrations” to see how sacrificial vessels in *Illustrated Regulations for Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Imperial Qing Dynasty* were depicted. It demonstrates an emphasis on standardization and fundamentals in depicting “vessels” that resulted in playing down the individual and unique qualities of a particular object. The color paintings in this edition of *Illustrated Regulations for Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Imperial Qing Dynasty* also clearly manifest the luster and perfection of the vessel surface to accurately serve as models for what the ideal vessels should look like.

The study then presents an overview to viewing several notes of importance in the Qianlong court’s project of reworking sacrificial vessels. First, “ancient ritual vessel” had to be worthy of the name in order to express a sense of reverence. Hence, the court disagreed with the use of porcelain bowls and plates by the previous court (of the Ming dynasty). Second, the set of bronze utensils produced by the Yongzheng court and presented to the Temple of Confucius at Qufu for ceremonial use was an important inspiration and foundation for the Qianlong project. However, the Qianlong plan for a national set of ceremonial rituals exceeded the overall considerations of the Confucian

temple sacrifices in terms of both scale and design. Third, the complexities of vessel forms in Song and Yuan dynasty books on the rites were reduced and simplified into fourteen types for a strong sense of uniformity. Finally, the complete system of sacrificial vessels emphasized a greater degree of and attention to hierarchical classification, the forms and colors serving as important elements used to exercise control over ranking.

Keywords: *Illustrated Regulations for Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Imperial Qing Dynasty*, ritual vessels, sacrificial vessels

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)